Health Information Resources on the Internet:
An Introduction for the Busy Clinician

National Network of Libraries of Medicine

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Food. Clothing. Shelter. E-mail.

An advertisement for an Internet Service Provider seen on the side of a bus in Seattle

http://www.toyota.com/

World Wide Web addresses (URLs) are:

seen on television,

heard on the radio,

printed in magazines, newspapers,

and on business cards

How Are People Using the Internet?

- To communicate
  - Electronic mail, listservs and newsgroups
- To locate facts, documents, images
  - World Wide Web
- To connect to databases
  - e.g., MEDLINE, HealthSTAR
- To distribute information

What Can You Really Use? E-mail!

Electronic mail

- pressno@u.washington.edu
  user@host server

- Communicate with individuals and groups of people

- Join an electronic discussion group

  - Listservs

  - Usenet newsgroups

  - Chat groups

Electronic Discussion Groups

Listservs and newsgroups

- Share in discussions on relevant topics
- Learn about new ideas, meetings, and more
- Ask questions
- Opinion gathering
- Associations communicating with members

Listservs and Newsgroups

- Native American Health List - nat-hlth
  - listserv@tamvm1.tamu.edu
  - subscribe nat-hlth Firstname Lastname
- Physician Assistant List - primarypa
  - majordomo@list.mc.duke.edu
  - subscribe primarypa Firstname Lastname
- Newsgroups
  - sci.med.telemedicine
  - misc.health.alternative

What Can You Really Use?
The Web!

The World Wide Web

- World Wide Web address: (URL)
  - **http://www.medmatrix.org/index.stm**
  - protocol://webserver/file
- Provides a way to organize, view and link resources on the Internet

World Wide Web

- Enables point-and-click navigation
- Enables viewing of multi-media resources
- Requires a browser program
  - e.g., Netscape or Internet Explorer

What Is a Browser?

- Software needed for navigating the Web
- Graphical browser
  - Netscape or Internet Navigator
  - Graphical browsers are installed on **your** computer
  - Graphical browsers provide point and click navigation

Browser Navigation

- Location
  - Address (URL)
- Starting page

The Starting Page You Select ...

- Should be:
  - Well organized and easy to navigate
  - In the user's main area of interest
  - Kept up-to-date
- Should have:
  - Reviewed links to other topical locations
  - Links to search tools

Browser Navigation

- Back
- Forward
- Home
- Stop
- Print
- Bookmarks

What Might You Find on the Web?

- Government information
- University publications and experiments
- Non-profit organizations' information
- Commercial information & ads
- "Labors of Love"
- Opinions

- NOT all journal articles

Using the Internet today is like trying to use a library where all the books have been dumped on the floor and the lights turned out. Everything's there, but we need better flashlights (browsers), search time (bandwidth), and room directions (directories) to find it.

A.J. Vendeland, in Review of The Software Publishers Association Europe Conference, Conference Analysis, June 28, 1996

Strategy for the Busy Clinician

- Is the Internet likely to have your answer?
- Can you find it from your starting page or your bookmarks?
- Search the web
- Ask on a discussion list

Types of Web Search Tools

- Subject specific
  - e.g., MedWeb
- General
  - e.g., Alta Vista

Subject-Specific Search Tools

- Resources compiled on specific topics
- Human judgment used to select sites
- Search completeness depends on Web sites chosen by compiler
- Lessens the chance of totally irrelevant hits

Let's Look at a Subject-Specific Search Tool...

- Textword searching on the Web
- Software scours the Web to create indexes
- Search retrieval created from keyword indexes
- Good for broad/experimental searching
- Good for very specific searching, like names

General Search Tools

- Sites are chosen by an algorithm, not human judgement
- Search completeness varies widely
- Search uses textwords and/or subject hierarchy
- Many irrelevant hits
- Different tools do not overlap much

Let's Look at a General Search Tool...

Hints for Using Search Tools

- Always look for the Help section and **READ IT!**
- Get to know a search tool's capabilities
- The Rule of Threes:
    - Try your search at least three different ways
    - Try it in three different search tools

Evaluating What You Find

- Authority
  - Who is the author of the information?
  - What is the author's affiliation?
  - Who is the publisher?

- Objectivity
  - Who is the sponsor of the Web site?
  - What are the goals and aims of the presenter of the site?

Evaluating What You Find

Accuracy

- Reliable and free from error

Coverage

- Is it complete for the topic and audience?

Currency

- When was this produced?
- Has it been updated?

Time
To
Search !

NN/LM PNR

- University of Washington, Box 357155
  Seattle, WA 98195-7155
- nnlm@u.washington.edu
- 1-800-338-7657
- 1-206-543-8262
- http://www.nnlm.nlm.nih.gov/pnr/